



Emergency Management **UPDATE**

April 2001



Panic attack? Dr. Henry W. Fischer III dispels disaster myths at the 2001 VEM Conference (Story and photo by Bob Lambert).

Disaster myths trip up emergency managers and the public alike

When disaster strikes, those directly affected tend to panic, loot and refuse to move to safety — these are typical views of what happens. According to an expert on the sociology of disaster, these and other misperceptions in the minds of the public and emergency managers may result in the misallocation of resources.

"We believe that people become deviant and do bad things," says Dr. Henry W. Fischer III, sociology professor at Millersville University of Pennsylvania. "In fact, most people are altruistic in a disaster. We spend time and resources on what doesn't happen rather than on helping the public with what they actually need."

After researching disaster behavior, Fischer concluded that emergency managers along with the public were basing decisions on wrong information. Rarely did the public run off in a panic or engage in looting in a disaster area, and officials rarely imposed martial law.

The crime rate, he says, goes down, not up. Local merchants who depend on the good will of the public to stay in business not only don't price gouge, they often donate goods to help disaster victims. Workers usually stay on the job and, in fact, often have to be told to go home.

An informal survey of the 300 emergency management professionals attending the 2001 Virginia Emergency Management Conference showed their perceptions tracked with those of the public. Fischer says the mass media has helped perpetrate disaster myths through movies, television news, newspapers and magazines. "When we started in this business we already believed in the disaster myth and believed that it was real," Fischer says.

Many disaster plans respond to the disaster mythology of deviant anti-social behavior rather than addressing the real needs of the public. "The National Guard should help clean up debris rather than guard against looting," Fischer says.

An expanded version of this article is available on our Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us/emupdate. Dr. Fischer can be reached by phone at (717) 872-3568 or e-mail at hfisher@millersv.edu.

Should I stay or should I go?

Evacuate or stay? When a hurricane threatens Virginia, that is a question many coastal residents will be asking themselves. Evacuation decision making for citizens will be one of the primary themes of **2001 Hurricane Preparedness Week**, June 3-9.



Proclaimed by Governor Gilmore, this first week of hurricane season is an excellent opportunity to increase hurricane awareness and preparedness in your city, county or town. Along with our annual awareness and statewide media campaign, VDEM is also producing a special brochure to help coastal residents decide whether to evacuate or stay.

The Hampton Roads Emergency Management Committee (HREMC) will sponsor the following regional Hurricane Expos:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| May 19 | Williamsburg Lowe's |
| June 27-July 3 | Virginia Beach Central Library |
| July 7 | Patrick Henry Mall |

A full list of expos and sponsors is available on the HREMC Web site at www.hremc.org. Visit the VDEM Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us for more hurricane/disaster preparedness news.

Will you change your local planning and response process based on Dr. Fischer's revelations? Contact Bob Lambert at rlambert@vdem.state.va.us or (804) 897-6500, ext. 6575, by April 12, and we'll publish your responses in our next issue.

EM commitment expected to prevail in Washington

By George Foresman
VDEM Deputy State Coordinator

With a new administration and Congress in Washington, change is inevitable. However, it may take about six months to get a handle on the specific changes that lie in store for Virginia's emergency managers.

In February, I made the now familiar trek to Washington for the semi-annual National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) conference.

I see a continuing strong commitment to emergency management nationally but expect changes and adjustments to existing programs.

The unknown is out there. Until the new administration and Congress settle out a little, the unknown will remain a challenge for emergency management. We will continue to move ahead, but we need to be prepared to adjust our programmatic focus as federal priorities become clearer.



Three major areas emerged from the meeting that require close monitoring are:

- ★ What direction the new administration and Congress will take on emergency management.
- ★ How FEMA will develop rules and regulations to implement congressional revisions to the Stafford Act.
- ★ What strategic approach the federal government will develop toward domestic terrorism.

States, their governors and local communities need to continue emergency management programs with an understanding of

federal policies. We're riding on a sea of momentum in recognizing the need for effective emergency management and need to find ways to sustain that momentum.

FEMA will implement regulations to carry out changes in the Stafford Act approved last year. I expect changes to affect disaster assistance, individual and family assistance and mitigation programs.

The administration is expected to develop a national terrorism strategy. The theme I heard at the conference is we're not simply preparing for terrorism but for emergencies and disasters, *including* terrorism.

NEMA serves as a facilitator and catalyst to identify and generate needed changes to emergency management policy and as a clearinghouse for the states. We want to ensure a national — not a federal — approach to emergency management in the most harmonious way possible.

Editor's Note: An expanded version of this article is available on our Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us/emupdate.

Project Impact communities move ahead with mitigation programs

By Bob Lambert, Staff Writer

In the three years since the Roanoke Valley became the first Virginia community to receive the Project Impact designation, three others have joined the effort to make their communities disaster resistant.

Though a few of the players have changed, their commitment to creating a safer Virginia has not. Here is a progress report from some of the charter members of this nationwide hazard mitigation team.

Roanoke Valley

Tom Cain, recently named Project Impact coordinator for the Roanoke Valley, says applying macro-architecture design and construction standards to new development could help avoid costly mistakes of the past.

He believes the region's localities can build a public consensus on future growth and development by dealing with the problems its three watersheds together.

"The Roanoke region is not yet under intense development pressure, so we have

the time to think and to plan," says Cain, a former architect.

"Disaster mitigation is, and will remain, Project Impact's baseline concern."

Virginia Beach

A coastal area exposed to hurricane flooding, Virginia Beach has had to grapple with the problems of rapid expansion. Project Impact Manager Julie Gifford is promoting Project Impact concepts through public awareness programs.

A Business Disaster Survivability seminar on March 14 outlined steps to continuing commercial operations after disaster strikes. A March 22-25 Home Safety and Preparedness Expo included a section focused on the Project Impact approach to building more disaster-resistant communities.

Chesapeake

In nearby Chesapeake, emergency management officials are building community partnerships for long-term mitigation.

(continued on page 4)

In the Spotlight



Congratulations to this year's recipients of the Addison E. Slayton, Jr., Scholarship.

Chesapeake Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator Hui-Shan Walker will use her scholarship for masters studies in public administration at Old Dominion University. She has served in her current position for about a year and previously worked for the American Red Cross.



VDEM employee Anthony McLean will apply the scholarship funds toward his master's degree studies in public administration at the University of Central Michigan. McLean currently serves as the operations supervisor for the agency's Reservist Program and has been with VDEM for 11 years.

THE HAZMAT FILES



Surprise package? Without manifests for the cargo in this overturned trailer, responders could not safely secure the area (courtesy photo).

Mixed load packs 'trouble'

When the 27-foot short trailer overturned on the Interstate 95 Colonial Heights exit ramp on Nov. 20, 2000, the mixed cargo created a grab bag of problems for responders.

The driver crawled out of the tractor but was unable to retrieve all the manifests for the cargo that included containers of solid and liquid sodium hydroxide and acetic acid. A small amount of liquid seen leaking from the left front corner of the trailer also caused concern.

"Since this was a mixed cargo, we had to identify everything onboard the trailer," says Area 2 Hazmat Officer Steve De Lisi, who responded to the incident. "You have to look at all the bills of lading, the quantity and potential mix of chemicals involved."

"We didn't want to go into the overturned cab, so we phoned the shipper to get a complete inventory of the materials."

The shipper faxed Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) and other information to the VDEM command vehicle. Some of the containers were labeled with trade names rather than the actual chemicals inside, adding to the confusion at the scene.

Until the area was secured, two nearby businesses were shut down and evacuated as a precaution. Exit 53 on Interstate 95 was closed for about 10 hours.

This month in Virginia disaster history

Nearly 150 years ago, a severe earthquake shook areas in Western Virginia. The trembler on April 29, 1852, felled a chimney near Wytheville in southwest Virginia, and shook down tops of chimneys at Buckingham Courthouse, about 30 miles south of Charlottesville.

Houses were shaken violently at Staunton, about 40 miles west of Charlottesville. The quake also was felt in the District of Columbia, Maryland, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania. The quake was estimated at magnitude 4.9.



In the field, hazmat officers should turn to the shipper to positively identify the products and provide guidelines and MSDS information to handle them, De Lisi says.

"With extensive experience in handling their own products, shippers usually are the best source of information," De Lisi says. "The shipper and carrier should be able to bring that information to the table."

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) dispatched a chemist to help identify the chemicals onboard the trailer. The Henrico Hazardous Incident Team also responded and the Colonial Heights Fire Department deputy chief served as incident commander.

The team waited until all the shipments had been properly matched against the paperwork before entering the trailer. The manifests revealed that a drum in the front of the truck contained acetic acid, but the hazmat team was unable to locate it. On-site testing revealed no presence of the corrosive.

"We have to make the time to be safe at the scene," De Lisi says. "I try to go into a situation where there are no surprises — just like a lawyer going into court wants to know ahead of time what the witnesses are going to say. You have to know the answers to the questions or you have no business going in. You stay back until you know what's there."

"This incident reinforced the need for accurate identification of all the items on board," De Lisi says. "It also demonstrated the importance of various agencies working together to identify and remove dangerous materials safely. DEQ responded to both incidents. They not only helped with the cleanup but also with the vital initial assessment."

For more information, contact Steve De Lisi at (804) 897-6500, ext. 6572, or by e-mail at sdelisi@vdem.state.va.us.



Gone but not forgotten. The hazardous materials community recently bid a sad farewell to one of its own. Staff Sgt. Andrew H. Bridges, 33, was among 21 National Guardsmen killed March 3 when their plane crashed in a Georgia cotton field. Bridges worked as a firefighter and paramedic and was a member of the Chesapeake hazmat team. He was married with two daughters.



Hines tones up Isle of Wight EM

A weight lifter in his spare time, Riddle Hines, Isle of Wight coordinator, has done a lot of heavy lifting for emergency management since he joined the county sheriff's office in 1989.

Read how Hines has reached out to elderly residents in his community and dealt with the chaos of Hurricane Floyd in this month's Profile in Emergency Management on our Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us/emupdate.

Training Calendar

Emergency Management

ICS/EOC Interface
April 25-26/Roanoke

Disaster Response and Recovery Operations
May 8-10/Newport News

Coordinator's Briefing
May 17/Abingdon

Emergency Planning Workshop
May 22-24/Virginia Beach

Mass Fatalities Incident Mgmt.
June 5-7/Fairfax

Reservist Training

I & P Workshop
April 24/Richmond

Lessons Learned Workshop
May 8/Richmond

**Media Awareness Workshop/
Asking for Help**
May 10 & June 5/Richmond

Reservist Program Seminar
May 16/Roanoke

VEOC Tabletop Exercise
June 5/Richmond

Search and Rescue

First Responder
April 21-22/Fairfax

CAP GSAR Institute (Part II)
April 27-29/Ft. AP Hill

SAR Council Meeting
April 28/Richmond

IC/MC Course/Meeting
June 1-3/Charlottesville

Technological Hazards

Advanced Hazmat Control
April 30-May 11/Ashland

Terrorism Training Courses:

**Public Safety Response to
Terrorism — Management**
April 10-11/Lynchburg

**Public Safety Response to
Terrorism — Awareness**
June 16/Roanoke

Contact Patrick Collins at (804)
897-6500, ext. 6568, or pcollins@vdem.state.va.us to schedule
terrorism training courses.

Project Impact (continued from page 2)

"We want to empower the citizens and businesses of Chesapeake with the knowledge of how to safeguard their families, homes and businesses," says Patricia Chappell, Project Impact coordinator.

"Mitigation is as simple and basic as the saying we were taught in grade school — 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.' Here, prevention can save lives, property and livelihoods."

Chesapeake has won business support for the Community Rating System of the National Flood Insurance Program that may bring lower insurance rates following certification.

"Chesapeake is promoting the mitigation concept and is committed to it. It's becoming a way of doing business."

Central Shenandoah

The Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission, the most recent Project Impact Community, is using every opportunity to alert their citizens about mitigating losses in the flood-prone region. This month in Staunton, the *Kids Matter Day* child safety program includes a traveling display showcasing the issue.

"The display features pictures of relocated and elevated structures," says Rebecca Joyce, Project Impact coordinator. "They focus on flood hazards in the valley and why residents should be worried."

Read more about Virginia Project Impact communities in the expanded version of this article on our Web site at www.vdem.state.va.us/emupdate.



Most likely to make an impact. Virginia Project Impact coordinators (first row, left to right) Tom Cain, Rebecca Joyce, Patricia Chappell and Julie Gifford stand tall with the support of VDEM mitigation staff Richard Dameron, Allyson Zoby and Michelle Pope at the 2001 VEM Conference.



Read more about it ... Learn more about Virginia's award-winning Search and Rescue program in next month's issue. Coordinated by VDEM's Winnie Pennington, the program received the Clarence "Pete" Rea Award for outstanding group achievement at the 2001 VEM Conference in Williamsburg.



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